

# **Managing the Craft Industry of Sri Lanka: A Study of the History of the Governance, Policies and Political Interventions with reference to *Molagoda* Pottery, *Weweldeniya* Cane and *Pilimathalawa* Brass Work**

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## **Abstract**

The craft revival sees craft increasingly recognized as a growing industrial sector with benefits linked to educational, cultural, and economic development policy agendas of the country. The “Vistas of Prosperity and Splendor”, the policy statement of the SLPP government in 2019 emphasized the value of uplifting the selected traditional craft sector of Sri Lanka. This paper brings awareness of the policy decisions that place the craft sector in Sri Lanka from the Kandyan historical period today. Considering the craft sector perspectives of the government as policy initiatives it situates the disciplines and practices of crafts within their institutional support networks, organizational contexts and acquires attention to the role of individuals in driving agendas. The paper focuses on the policies and political interventions on crafts development. Moreover, it is clear that today’s political interest in craft is no longer limited to a creative industry’s agenda and the ‘demands’ specific to the creative economy. The research reveals that the government initiatives on craft education and skill schemes that are geared towards broader economic and educational goals to sustain the national economy of the country must be properly addressed to the coupled economic stability of the country with a creative economy.

**Keywords:** craft industry, art and craft, governance, policies

## **1. Introduction**

Sri Lankan culture has many varieties of crafts that brought world attention for ages. Crafts have played an important role in the economic and social life of the Sri Lankans from time immemorial. Craft also identified as small enterprises are a vital part of the rural economy in traditional industries, and their contribution to the development of the whole economy is quite substantial. More significantly, in developing nations, small and medium-sized enterprises are considered the backbone of the rural economy.

After the collapse of the ruling systems of the Kingdom, the crafts sector has begun to change. It is clear from 72 years of political history that every government that has come to power so far has launched its political policies declaring that the development of the arts and crafts will bring economic benefits to the country. It was clear from this study that every government that came to power after independence adopted a number of valuable state policies to promote the arts and crafts. It is clear that these industries have made

significant progress due to the programs implemented so far, but due to a number of issues that have not yet been resolved, these industries have not yet achieved the expected growth.

There is a renaissance in crafts development and production has been unfolding after the newly appointed government *Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP) in 2019. In the last seven decades, efforts have been made to uplift the craft sector in Sri Lanka. The recent reasons for this crafts renaissance involve a realization by the government that unique characteristics of the crafts that can be the main tourism attractions, which increases foreign exchange earnings. Coupled to this is the failure of large and medium-scale industries to provide enough employment for growing populations, and the alternative employment-creating potential of small labor-intensive crafts enterprises that use local technologies and materials. To manage the craft industry, the government has the ability of substituting locally made good quality crafts products for expensive imported goods. This way can lead to preservation of the local craft industry, energize community development. During the past 70 years different governments have introduced different policies to uplift the craft industry. During the 60's it was known as the golden period in the craft industry. The crafts have now come back and politicians are discovering the crafts as an invigorating factor in the country's economic policy. At present, the education specialists and academics have begun to re-evaluate the importance of developing and applying manual skills of the craft industry. Therefore, the policymakers become increasingly aware of the authenticity of a vibrant crafts sector. Under devolution arrangements of the newly appointed *Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna* (SLPP), appointed a Minister responsible for the creative industry and cultural policies that affect craft. HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT, under Article 44(1) of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, to appoint the 39 State Ministers, with effect from August 12, 2020 and among them appointed a State Minister of Rattan, Brass, Pottery, Furniture and Rural Industrial Promotion is significant in terms of promoting and uplifting craft industry in Sri Lanka (Gazette, 2020). It is not surprising in today's political context that the latest articulation of crafts is reconnecting with the national political agendas of economic development and skills training. However, while the relationship between craft and economic development policy is not new, there is an observable shift in policy makers' engagement with craft, from attracting and protecting craft production and skills to actively participating in the structural set-up of the craft sector, though, for example, new training and the introduction of apprenticeship models for design and product development.

I argue that the history of governance, political intervention, and policymaking are hand in hand, and craft development has a significant impact on the intangible heritage and the local economic development of the area. The objective of the research paper is to address two questions: How did political intervention and policymaking shape industry development and change over time? How does local governance influence the crafts industries? The research paper is organized into four main sections. First, discusses the theoretical background that describes the centrality of the status of the craft industry. The second section outlines the data and methodology. Third, analyzes the evolution of craft industries through different state policies within the socio-cultural, political structure of the country. The final section gives recommendations that highlight the sustainable aspects of the craft industry through policy recommendations.

## **2. Research Methodology**

In January 2020, in three different locations on the Colombo-Kandy Road in Sri Lanka, fieldwork was conducted to study how the craft industries had been influenced by the government policies that shape the

development of the industry so far. Traditional craft industry villages that specialize in brassware, pottery, and cane products are Pilimathalawa, Molagoda, and Wewaldeniya. The first stage of fieldwork consisted of site observations to identify and map craft industry locations, and their present status (product category, income level, problems). Next, ten field surveys and ten semi-structured interviews were carried out with artisans, and officials who engaged directly with the artisans of government-allied Institutions. In order to analyze the government policies on the craft industries imposed so far, this research adopted a qualitative method. The next stage is the creation of database for the study. Using field observation data, a database was created and separately tabulated in four phases the period of Kingdoms, colonial period, pre-independent, post-independent and the period of liberalism. The major economic and socio-political changes in Sri Lanka correspond to these phases and developments of crafts such as, network development, promote apprenticeships, skill training, mentoring, support micro-businesses, state recognition of craftsman, promote new markets and foster innovations too. Field observation and interviews have been used as a guide to identify the policies and the implementation of the three craft industries in use. Field observation and interviews have been used as a guide to identifying the government policies and the practical issues that occurred when the implementation took place over the three craft industries identified in the study.

### 3. Study Setting

Wewaldeniya is a fascinating small town, which is famous for its exquisite cane products. “Wewaldeniya” the name itself gives a hint about the character of its place where “*Wewel*” in Sinhala refers to cane and “*deniya*” refers to a large land area. When travelling along the Colombo Kandy road one will come across small wayside shops selling cane products. This charming village of Wewaldeniya is located in Western province, Gampaha district and falls under the local authority of Meerigama pradeshiya sabha. Wewaldeniya is located 50 Km away from Colombo and can see a ribbon development of this small-scale cane industry along the Kandy road.

Pilimatalawa is a suburb of the city of Kandy that is famous for its traditional brassware. This small-scale brass industry has been preserved for a long period by the traditional craft community who lives in Narammala, Hendessa and Kiriwawula areas. Pilimatalawa is located in Central province Kandy district and falls under the Yatinuwara divisional secretariat. It is 12 km away from Kandy city. Brass industry in Pilimatalawa can be seen as developed sales points along the Gadaladeniya Paranapattiya road, Gadaladeniya road and Kandy Colombo main road. Originally, the traditional brassware industry was established in Kiriwawula, Handessa areas that falls under the Udunuwara of the Kandyan kingdom. This research paper stems from a larger project that examines the contemporary relevance of craft development through an analysis of policy and political practice in the broader development of the creative economy of Sri Lanka.



**Figure 2:** Pottery at Molagoda



**Figure 3:** Cane work at Wewelde



**Figure 4:** Brass work at Pilimathalawa



Figure 1: Selected craft villages

#### 4. Literature Review

Many scholars in the West frequently address how crafts promote the vernacular, the mundane, and the local tradition through handmade objects that convey important features of tradition and cultural values. The scarcity of research conducted on Asian crafts, however, affects the development of the craft sector. As Peterson (1984, 7) stated; *“Despite the significance of crafts industries to Asian economies, very little research has been done on their main economic and social parameters. In particular, the people who actually make crafts, the artisans themselves, have rarely been studied”*.

Peterson (1984, 5) states that ‘the crafts industry has been studied, but not the livelihoods of the people who actually make crafts. The oversight is one reason crafts development programs fail’. Silva (2019) found that one of the problems that stands in the way of moving towards holistic policy revisions is the lack of statistical information about the handicraft sector in Sri Lanka. She further stated that the Labour Force Survey (2017) enumerates that 1.36 million people are employed by “crafts and other related trades” but this is according to the ISCO-08 definitions, which also includes many manual labour trades such as house builders and finishers, painters, machinery workers, electricians and those involved in food processing (International Labour Organization, 2012). Moreover, craft as it is a cultural asset and also highly valued as an economic asset. The crafts also offer many opportunities for development to nations that are in all parts of the world. (Silva, 2019, Daskon, 2010) UNESCO identified craft as an intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and marked Convention for Safeguarding in 2003. The manifesto identified 6 categories of areas as crafts and traditional craftsmanship is one of them. The below description is stated in the convention 2003 as intangible cultural heritage,

“Practices, representation, expression, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity...” (Adopted from UNESCO, 2003)

Schneider (2004) stated that governance is an abstract frame which covers broad areas of institutional arrangements by coordination, regulation, control of social systems and subsystems is enabled and facilitated. Craft enriches human lives and unveiling boundaries of techniques and artistic skills (Bennet, 2019). Silva (2019) further stated that industrial capitalism brought revival of crafts in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and sought to connect craftsman to the object then to the purpose of the object. This way sought to revive commercial viability and people’s passion for design integrity and craft production, unity in worker and consumer with the object created. It was realized that a social phenomenon had become a policy and remained in social life for a period of time. Koïman (2007) identified two ways of governance as ‘old’ politics-policy approach and policy - politics approach is more discursive policy for people in society to voice their concerns.

## **5. Analysis, Results and Discussion**

### ***5.1 Political intervention and policymaking shape industry development and change over time***

#### ***5.1.1 Phase One: Craft industries and local governance: historical roots and development***

The patronage of local arts and crafts during the Kandyan period (the three centuries prior to the arrival of the British) lay with the King (Robin, 2008). Coomaraswamy (1956) says that before the colonial period, the hereditary training of craftsmen, or familial apprenticeship system, was the mainstay of the provision of a pool of skills craft workers. Pilimathalava brass smiths are descendants of the traditional artisan’s caste called ‘*navandanno*’. There is no recorded evidence to prove that the current pottery village of Molagoda or reed work in Wewaldeniya are descended from traditional Kandyan castes. The current practitioners say that they are descended from Kandyan castes. Coomaraswamy (1956) says that " in Galaboda Korale (in Ceylon, a *Korale* was formerly a revenue district) and Panakuru Korale are eight potters under the orders of a *vidane* (in the native headman system in Ceylon, the *vidane* was an influential post and appointed by the government agent (*disava*) In Kinigoda Korale and Beligal Korale are fourteen under another *vidane*, but sometimes one *vidane* is appointed over the potters of these three Korales.

Inscriptions mention the craft of pottery (*kumbal*) where the members of the occupation had to work in their sheds and produce the pots and utensils required by the community in the village. (Tilakasiri,1994). During the Kandyan period the potter’s service was considered as the essential service. The King offered *badabela panguya* called tenement of land held by a *badabelaya* (potter).The potter was compelled to supply earthenware for both domestic , social and religious festivals. The potters belonged to *kumbal kulaya* (potter caste) and served for *kumbal karyanshaya* (potter’s department) headed by an appointed *vidane* ( a group leader ) from the same caste. There were eight potters served under *vidane* of Galaboda Korake and Paranakuru Korale and fourteen potters were served for Kindigoda and Beligal Korale (division) these potters were served for the

Mahanuwara *maha gabadawa* (royal treasure of Kandyan palace) in a rotate system (Coomaraswamy 1956). One group of potters must serve for one month and must produce sufficient amounts of *walam* (cooking utensils), *ulu* (clay roofing tiles) and *gadol* (mud blocks used for construction). At the same time, they must supply hundred clay pots to the bungalow of *disava* (regional ruler) (Bell, trans 2005). The potters were also respected and afforded a recognized status in society as revealed by the genealogical names such as *Pandithayalage*, and *Panditige*. The word *panditha* denotes an accomplished or wise person. (Thilakasiri,1994).

According to Bell's report (trans. 2005) cane workers or rattan craftsmen belonged to *benda badda* which was known as a lower caste of carpenters during the Kandyan era. There were six *benda badda* families served under *vidane* (chieftain in the village). They must supply *wevel kavichchi* (cane couches) which are woven by use of canes, *putu* (chairs) and *pesi* (containers or baskets) to the King and *disava* (regional ruler). The supply chain mechanism of cane production goods was handled through *disava* and the *badda* (department) of the Kandyan Kingdom. Kandyan Kingdom took hold by the British in 1815. The British abolished the land tenure system (*rajakariya*). Robin (2008) says that the old system of artisan's dependent on Kings' patronage was also collapsed.

### **5.1.2 Phase Two: Political interventions before independence**

Phase one covers the period between the last Kingdom of Sri Lanka, 1590 to 1815, British colonization in 1815, and Sri Lankan independence from British rule in 1948. It was recorded that many young men from different villages participated in the craft training. The British education intended to promote local crafts and the education of craftsmen related to the distinction between creative and mimetic ability (Robin, 2008). In 1854 the British established Industrial School in Kandy. By the early 1900 there were a number of industrial schools throughout the island and there was a pottery workshop at Waragoga (Robin, 2008). Ceylon Social Reform Society in 1905, which sought to defend the country's cultural values. Ananda Coomaraswamy is an emblematic example of this nexus between craft revival and nationalism. His art research focused heavily on crafts and he was also instrumental in establishing the Ceylon Social Reform Society. The main objective of the Society is to encourage people in this country to practice their local culture without blindly imitating European culture. The Society also expects to protect the ancient arts and culture of the island (Silva, 2019).

During the Second World War (1939-43) and the post-war period the demand for locally produced goods rose and the cottage industries enjoyed a boom when the supply of imported items were restricted. The Marketing Department played a pivotal role in displaying and selling craft items, which were produced by cottage industries such as basket weaving and cane ware production (Thilakasiri, 1994). Nevertheless, in the early pre-independent era, attempts were made to rejuvenate the traditional craft industries because of the nationalist movement led by the Sri Lankan patriotic such as Anagarika Dharmapala.

### **5.1.3 Phase three: After the independence and in between the period of introduction of economic liberalism (1948-1977).**

An early step taken in the direction of giving institutional support to the craft and craftsmen was the establishment of the Department of Rural Development in the year of 1948. Its overall capacity has generally served the rural and cottage industries. The Department of Rural Development and Cottage Industries, established in 1957 as the main institution responsible for promoting the cottage industrial sector with the aim of achieving 3 goals, was merged into a separate department in 1952 (Thilakasiri, 1994). By considering

the improvements of cottage industries production methods set up a Small Industry Service Institute in Moratuwa 1962. Its aim was to set up provision for services such as field surveys, planning of workshops, enhancing production processes, design development, training and guidance services in respect of production, organization and management. From then on cottage industries were added on to Rural Development to constitute the new department taking responsibility for the promotion and development of small industries devoted to cottage industry, handicraft industry and small-scale industries (Thilakasiri, 1994). The department was renamed as the Department of Rural Development and Small Industries in 1968 and its scope of activities was expanded to include industries such as power looms, hand looms, carpentry, commercial pottery and coir fiber. In 1993, the Department of Small Industries was wound-up and its duties and functions were allocated to the provincial councils (Vijayakumar & et al, 2012). The Administration Report (1964-65) states that 10,000 young persons received training in cottage and handicraft industries at 422 training centers (Administration Report, 1956).

The establishment of Laksala in 1964 has provided support to local craftsmen in several areas such as brassware, silverware, jewellery, handicrafts, coir products and batiks (Obeyesekere, 1988). The establishment of Laksala as a sales point thirty years ago is illustrative of this type of intervention. It has provided support to local craftsmen in several areas' brassware, silverware, jewellery, handicrafts, coir products and batiks. It has increased the demand for such products among tourists and locals alike and inspired other government and private agencies to open similar outlets. Further with a view to promoting the export orientation of the small business sector, the Department of Handicraft Marketing and Export Promotion was established in 1980 by amalgamating Laksala and other handicraft marketing centers. This intervention has expanded informal production of crafts and kept many traditional art forms economical and financially viable (Sandaratne,2002). The Industrial Development Board of Ceylon (IDB) is a Statutory Board duly established under the Industrial Development Act No. 36 of 1969 aiming to encourage and assist in the development of small and medium scale industries.

In addition to this, establishment of rural industrial estates for landless craftsmen is another step initiated for adding better facilities and improving the living conditions of craftsmen. A village created by the government in 1965 near to Kandy called *Kala Puraya* (Craft city) in Nattharanpotha for traditional handicrafts men. Later this village was expanded in two phases and currently consists of about 100 families and a significant number of them involved with the brass industry. In addition, there are several manufacturers scattered in different other areas in the island who practice this industry. According to the census and statistics of Sri Lanka 2010, 0.58 % are involved in this industry and it contributes 5.6% to GDP (Chanjief, & et al, 2015). Between 1970-77 when the country adopted an import substitution industrial strategy a wide variety of consumer items were produced on a small scale and informal enterprises. With trade liberalization and encouragement of export led industrialization, small and cottage industries declined. A number of small cottage industries closed down in the face of superior and cheaper industrial imports. Factory industry now accounts for about 85% of industrial production, while small industry accounts for only 4% of total industrial output, its scope of operations has been expanded to include industries such as power looms, hand looms, carpentry, commercial pottery and coir fiber (Sandaratne,2002). It should also be mentioned that at the non-governmental level women organizations especially the *Lanka Mahila Samithiya* (Women Association) had promoted handicrafts and cottage industries and its growth for the progress of the womenfolk for over 30 years. It was run by mostly volunteer workers with over 2500 members spread out in 17 districts. They conducted training short term courses instructing subjects of handicrafts (Thilakasiri, 1994).

#### ***5.1.4 Phase four: The peak of the open economic system and the present situation (1977-2020)***

Craft industries in Sri Lanka were affected by changing governance structures in different timelines of Sri Lanka. After 1977 a new government formed and changed the economic policies of the country, leading towards an open economic system. The structural changes in the economy are reflected in the country's trade patterns. The open economy brought concurrent drastic changes that took over till today in political interventions. Daskon (2010) says that the open-market, relaxation of trade restrictions and increased raw material supply energized livelihood of Sri Lanka. The respondents revealed "upturns" and "downturns" of turmoil of political changes in Sri Lanka. According to Daskon's research the majority of respondents were elderly people, and had a better knowledge and experience of 1977 and after. As she said that "changing governance structures and economic policies is frequently a concurrent process and, according to respondents, the experiences were "mixed", with significant "upturns" and "downturns". According to her research, changes in economic policy are not always negative or cause a situation of vulnerability, and economic conditions can also move in a positive direction by implementing new policies and programs. The immediate policy reforms introduced by the new government in 1977, for instance, had significant positive impacts on rural life and the village craft business, particularly the open market, the relaxation of trade restrictions, the increased supply of drawing materials and a favorable climate for investment and tourism. In addition, Daskon states that, "Although the new government was blamed, it was the best time in our lives, because we had no "stress" or uncertainty about this industry. We were almost self-sufficient".

According to Daskon (2010 a), the politicization of government institutional structures, the escalation of pressures due to the unstable global economy, the deterioration of national security and local political instability have had substantially negative impacts on rural livelihoods when considering uncontrollable external trade consequences in the long term. In asserting the idea of one respondent, she clarified this statement, "our industry is becoming "hopeless. Some individuals have already given up and moved to work for a daily wage. However, for almost two decades, from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, these issues were at the center of official policy deliberations (Sathananthan, 1991). In addition, the economic skyline was subsequently dominated by expansion of imports, replacement industrial production (1956-1970), self-reliant industrial growth (1970-1977) and open economy with enclaved industrial production and expanding service sector (1977-1989).

The government's new policy has included liberalization of trade, resource mobilization through financial liberalization, more effective use of resources, institutional reforms (Dunham, & Kelegama, 1994). The policy objectives are to achieve higher economic growth rates and a higher quality of life, to reduce unemployment rates, to maintain an equal distribution of national income, to control inflation and to strengthen the balance of payments. The export-led industrialization strategy is intended to achieve these goals (Nufile, Santhirasegaram, Ismail, 2013). The country's liberalization program began when a supportive institution had been created. Sri Lanka Export Development Board (EDB) was established under the Sri Lanka Export Development Act no. 40 of 1979 with powers necessary for the promotion and development of exports in Sri Lanka. Employment generation increased after liberalization of the domestic industry. The National Crafts Council and Allied Institutions Act No. 35 of 1982 promulgated in Parliament with provision for the establishment of the National Craft Council (NCC), the Sri Lanka Handicrafts Board (SLHB) and the National Design Centre (NDC) for the purpose of promoting the development and fostering of improvement of their quality and matters under the Ministry of Rural Industrial Development, National Design Center (NDC), and National Craft Council (NCC) established under Allied Institution Act No 35 of



1982 provide training, technology and marketing assistance for small entrepreneurs. Pye argues that the First Public Investment Program of 1979—83 stated 44 that one of its objectives was the promotion of small and medium-scale industries, particularly in the rural areas, where unemployment is the most severe (Pye, 1988). In 1993, the Department of Small Industries was wound-up and its duties and functions were allocated to the provincial councils (Gamage, 2003). The Ministry of Rural Industries developed a system of bulk purchase of the raw material and makes these available in small quantities to individual producers. This scheme is also tied to a credit scheme with a bank to facilitate the purchase of the raw material (Sandaratne, 2002). However, Daskon (2010) says that the open-market, relaxation of trade restrictions and increased raw material supply energized livelihood of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Handicrafts Board (SLHB) facilitated traditional skills development and operated 17 pottery centers scattered in the island, the Molagoda Centre is the best known and developed. Under the direction of International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) consultation established a multi chamber kiln working on firewood at Molagoda were designed and introduced (Thilakasiri, 1994). Industry capacity report (EDB) states that the major export market of handicrafts are USA, Japan and Europe and growth in the last five years in export and main importing countries (7.34% USD 53Mn in 2014). Number of people employed in the sector is approximately 200,000(EDB report, 2014) It is visible that several governments took initiatives for stabilizing craft developments through several reforms.

The next political regime started in 2005- 2014 and the political imperatives are seen to be interrelated with craft development programmes. According to the president's "*Mahinda Chintana*" or Vision for a New Sri Lanka, a policy framework, "*Divi Neguma*" which is "One Product; One Village" programme on Cottage Industries led by the Ministry of Traditional Industries and Small Enterprise Development activated island-wide. The programme captured 46 promising and viable industrial clusters covering rush and reed, cane, clay and brass-based handicrafts. (Vijayakumar & et al, 2012). The main objective of this project is to develop traditional industrial villages by increasing productivity, facilitating access to new technology, training opportunities, market access, making improvements to infrastructure and achieving economic and social progress. Since 2005 there have been 256 production villages and formed 105 producers' cooperative societies. According to the 2012 Budget Proposal, the development of traditional craft village projects identifies 12 existing craft villages, including rush and reed and clay products, with the capacity to develop local and export products and to provide support for improving the quality and technology of products. (Priyanath, & Premaratne, 2014). The objective was to enhance capacity to develop products to local and export markets and provide support to improve product quality and facilitate access to market. Traditional handicraft villages with specialization in sectors such as, jewellery, lacquer and *sesath*, musical instrument, rush and reed, masks, coir, gift items and souvenir items, *Dumbara* mats, clay-based products, palmyrah based handicrafts were strengthened under this project. Gamage (2009) shows similar processes with the implementation of neo-liberal economic ideology, policies and programmes since 1977 in Sri Lanka (Coomaraswamy, 1984; Gosh, 2003; Hettige and Mayer, 2000; Kelegama, 2004, 2005; Lakshman, 1997; Sandaratne, 2000; Uyangoda, 2007; Winslow and Woost, 2004).

The previous *Yahapalana* Government (2015-2019) initiated new measures to rectify the importance of learning craft as a subject from the school level. The Ministry of Education introduced 13-year continuous education for all students which is a vocational stream for GCE A/L to develop the skills and protect the right to education of all children, the project was implemented as a pilot project from 2017 October and by 2019 the project covered the entire school year. This stream is referred to as the Professional Curriculum,

which include Art and Craft subjects among the 26 new subjects. It can be understood that this policy decision is timely valued and addressed the problem in a systematic manner.

National statistics, surveys, and secondary sources all suggest that the production of Sri Lankan craft is based on local communities using local market materials. Due to their great ability, craftspeople throughout Sri Lanka have been recognized as "living masters" and yet many of them have little or no education. The economic contribution of crafts can make an important contribution to local economies and can even make a better contribution to domestic production. In the professionalization and improvement of areas to be addressed in the local and international focus of crafts, government handicraft policies play a crucial role. The National Design Centre, the National Craft Council and the Sri Lanka Handicraft Board are still the main bodies responsible for Sri Lankan crafts (Laksala). The National Design Centre is responsible for carrying out, among these institutions, research materials and processes and for developing innovative designs and technologies in order to develop and increase the efficiency of the crafts sector. The National Craft Council overlooks the welfare and community stimulation of craftsmen, awards, creates learning opportunities, welfare systems, and financial assistance, and encourages the preservation of crafts. The Sri Lanka Handicraft Board explored other aspects of marketing, creating selling opportunities for craft items, providing machinery and raw materials, training for craftsmen, assurance of product quality, and credit facilities. Annually, the National Craft Council organizes craft contests and exhibitions. They award prizes at the provincial and national levels, work closely with officials of the Small Industries Department at the provincial level, and conduct internal monitoring systems to improve the quality of products. The exhibitions at the provincial and national levels are accompanied by award competitions for various categories of crafts, including brass, cane and pottery. These awards and exhibitions have a significant impact on stimulating enthusiasm of craftsmen and the people who visit to see them. As Bennet (2019) notes that the craft market is expressed through a multitude of small sales and fairs, alongside commissions, galleries, exhibitions and international exports and supported by a growth in the appetite for experiencing the personal and the authentic in handmade or small batch-produced artefacts.

The study findings demonstrate a more complex relationship between governance, policies with historical, cultural, factors as influential forces of craft development of Molagoda pottery, Pilimathalawa brass, and Wevaldeniya cane craft. Historically, the craft sector is governed by the standards of its traditional system of guilds. However, when the value chain of the craft industries is regulated by raw material policies, skills, creativity, manufacturing, marketing, distribution and consumption, human resources with the necessary skills and creativity are crucial to the value chain. The liberalization policy of 1977 impacted significantly on this unsatisfactory situation in the craft sector. The most harmful among them was the severe competition from imported goods (Athukorala, 1986). Wijewardena (1989) identified that after 1977 the growth of small industry has declined significantly. He pointed out that severe competition from low-priced imports, seem to have hampered the growth of small-scale enterprises while imposing a serious threat even to their survival in certain cases. The most serious problem identified in the study is that the inconsistency of policies is a structural challenge. There is an overhaul of decision-makers and policy directions when a government changes, resulting in an inability to sustain long-term objectives and development. There is, on the whole, an attitude towards the craft economy that presumes a lot from the craftsman's own initiative, arising from an assumption that craftsmen should function as "entrepreneurs."

## 5.2 Local governance influences the crafts industries

### 5.2.1 Cane Works

Originally, the traditional cane industry was initiated in the village of Radawadunna during the early 1930's. Therefore, according to the villagers, cane industry is not identified as an oldest traditional craft industry, which came from early kingdom periods. According to the respondent states that, *"Originally in Radawadunna, the cane industry was initiated. For a favor done to the king, it was granted as a "Nindagama." And during the period of the Second World War, the people of this village began supplying the army with bamboo mats (bata pelali) and that generation ultimately engaged in cane production and passed down from generations as there were enough raw materials in this area. And along the main roads, the development of Kandy road and increased sales of products"*.

Starting from the early 1990's it has eventually developed as a small-scale traditional craft industry in Sri Lanka. Currently, the cane industry has spread in Wewaldeniya as a shopping street along the Colombo Kandy road however; this traditional industry was originated in the innermost village of Radawadunna due to many reasons. One of the main reasons was the availability of raw material. *"The area had previously been enriched with raw materials; we are now bringing materials from the areas of Batticaloa and Manampitiya. The problem of raw material deficiency and the lack of labor is the main problem of the cane sector. Earlier in my shop I had around 25 to 30 workers but now they all have gone for other small jobs to sustain their lives as the cane industry has now fallen to the lowest level."*

Having enriched with raw materials and availability of skilled cheap labor from the surrounding areas such as Nittambuwa, Gampaha was the two main reasons for the establishment of this traditional cane industry in this area. The industry was in a developed state during the 1960's and 1970's as the government provided essential facilities like buildings and training centers. Moreover, with the introduction of the National Craft Council and allied institutions act no 35 of 1982 the National Craft Council conducted few training, new designs and provided materials. Therefore, the traditional cane industry flourished at that time. However currently none of these institutions and the government has a systematic procedure to uplift this traditional industry. Therefore, now the traditional industry is moving towards its end as they are running out of raw materials labor and a market. The impact of the open economy, many substitutes were imported from foreign countries. Therefore, the demand and the market for the traditional industry has gradually decreased. Therefore, a clear-cut systematic procedure and a straightforward government policy should be introduced to uplift this traditional cane industry.

*"When it comes to the cane industry, raw materials are the major barrier for the development of this industry. Currently the country is running out of cane. In addition, there is a limited supply by two suppliers to this area". (Interview) "The market demand for cane products have gradually decreased along with the introduction of supplement materials such as polythene plastics by the open economic system". (Interview)*

With these identified problems in the industry, forecasting the future demonstrates that the sector is gradually declining. The raw material issue should primarily be solved in order to get rid of this dark future of the industry. At present measures have been taken to plant raw materials through the *"Shilpa sabawata gasak situwamu"* ("Should plant a tree for National Craft Council ") program with the government assistance of the National Craft Council. In addition, various exhibitions and training programs for craftsmen have been organized by the National Craft Council and allied institutions to uplift this industry. *"With the assistance of the current government we have started the "Shilpa Sabawata Gasak Situwamu" program and have acquired underutilized government lands to plant the raw materials and we give the maintenance of these plantations to the cane craftsman societies in the*

*particular areas” (Interview). “We have organized an exhibition in “Diyatha Uyana” targeting the Sinhala and Tamil New Year with the entire handicrafts products. This will help them to get exposed to the market and know the needs of the people” (Interview). “With the government changes the assistance given to the sector differs, one of the drawbacks by the institutions is that new designs are not introduced recently for the craftsman’s, our craftsman are ready to do new designs if they are provided with enough raw materials” (Interview)*

### **5.2.2 Brass Works**

The history of the traditional brassware industry of Sri Lanka runs back to the period of bringing the sacred Bo tree sapling were eight different craft castes came from India accompanied by Buddhist nunnery Sangamiththa. Accordingly, during the kingdom periods the King has provided lands “*nindagam*” for various castes for the service they provided and that marks the beginning of the traditional brassware industry in Sri Lanka. “*This came originally from India. From the eight casts who came with Sri Maha Bodhi. Then the king provided lands to these casts and that’s how the industry began*” (interview 3)

In the past raw materials were provided by the King to do the brassware of the kingdom. Eventually this traditional industry developed as a small-scale industry in the country, which contributes to the local economy. Currently the raw materials are sometimes provided by the government at concessionary rates and also the artisans buy raw materials by their own to make their products. The industry flourished during the period of 1960’s when the government provided raw materials twice a year at concessionary rates and held exhibitions training programs to uplift the industry. Further, the industry started to decline after introducing the open economy to Sri Lanka. However, during the ruling period of president Chandrika Bandaranayake, the Ministry of Industrial Development carried out many procedures to uplift these traditional crafts marking a golden age in the industry. Gradually the *Yabapalana* Government also provided raw materials twice a year at concessionary rates. However, if the present government did not take such steps to uplift this industry most probably the industry will be declined. “*This industry began to spread after 1977. Many people began to move to this sector with the development of roads. Individuals had money. Ownership of private vehicles rose. We’ve gained a lot. We had a big workshop and had our products exported to Japan. But we have had to compete against imported goods in recent history.*” (Interview)

### **5.2.3 Pottery**

In Molagoda, the industry has spearheaded and the production of these pottery products takes place in Budamawatta, the innermost village in the region. The country's infrastructure development accelerated after the introduction of new economic policies in the 1970's, and Colombo-Kandy road development was among those. In the early 1970s, with only a few shops, the Molagoda pottery industry shifted to Colombo-Kandy Road and acted as the nucleus of the shopping strip. The outsiders were soon drawn to the business and shops emerged along the main road. Until today, the pottery industry was in a good state with certain difficulties during different periods of political governance. However, with the introduction of the open economy, the pottery products of the 1970s, aluminum, plastic pots and many easy methods of making money were replaced. Traditional pottery has therefore begun to decline and destabilize as it does not have innovative designs and creative new products and runs out of creativity. Therefore, with the same old traditional pottery products that cannot cope with modernized society and shortage of skilled labor, outdated designs and destabilization of the industry where the creativity moving away from the industry has been identified as the main issues in the current situation and the issue has been addressed by the National Design

Center in 2005. *“Traditional pottery industry has the old traditional designs of pots and pans from ages. No innovation has influenced the industry recently. Latest design has been introduced by the National Design Center in 2005” (Interview)*

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research reveals that state policies of craft act as a promoter and protector of state crafts. The neo-liberal policies made a huge impact on the craft sector letting cheap quality duplicated crafts from abroad. It is also revealed that no explicit policy or rationale for promoting crafts exists. Because there is also no commonly accepted definition, policymakers have been unable to agree on what the craft sector is. It is difficult to imagine efficient planning taking place in the absence of statistics, particularly employment data. The database must be improved. Therefore, it is suggested that policy makers who have engaged with leaders of craft societies all over the island can be an effective pathway to impact on making the policies. Policy makers often have the opportunity to use research evidence that pertains to craft to alter or develop policies, and have a mandate to work with and listen to the research community. The instinctive value felt for craft must be reflected by our education system.

There is a trend in product commercialization following the introduction of the open economy. After the 1980s, business and residential units in three locations increased. With open economic policies, however, there is a decrease in output. This is mainly due to the uncertainty in these industries. Interviews showed that because of the hardship of finding a fixed income and raw materials, the younger generation is moving out of the industry. In addition, several simple ways of earning money, such as three-wheeler driving, garment factories, have been opened up by the open economy. The rise in the ownership of private vehicles has affected the increase in the number of business outlets along the road. Capitalism, on the other hand, created a huge competition between the products of local cultural crafts and the goods exported.

The findings of the study indicate that although the relationship between the location and the craft industry today shows a loose link with the past, historical and cultural factors remain important in creating a market value for traditional craft products. In implementing strategies for different traditional craft clusters, it is therefore essential to understand the socio-cultural and geographical context of each craft cluster separately.

In the same vein, scholars have argued that there may be no significant improvements in laissez-faire public policies while facilitating the maintenance of the status -quo. There have always been craft clusters and skills, but individuals with their abilities can develop the sector to a certain level, which is not really the level of industry that would not bring large-scale commodification and profit. In order to raise craft production to an economically sustainable craft industry, local craftsmen have limitations. It is the state's responsibility to raise the condition of the craft cluster to the level of the industry. The neo-liberal state often neglects this duty and expects people to organize to overcome this obstacle. Nonetheless, some states have used progressive policies to facilitate industries within the neo-liberal framework and such policies have reported favorable conditions for the industry. The type of goods sold in these craft shops is slowly changing. A significant number of products are produced locally within a specific region, but there is a tendency to introduce various types of craft products that are produced in other regions. This can be seen in Wewaldeniya, in particular. There is a heterogenization of Molagoda sites in terms of style, pattern and design.

However, the provision of basic infrastructure and a handful of other supporting facilities, such as training courses and the organization of local craft competitions, appears to be the key provision in Sri Lanka for the

successive pro-neoliberal states. Over the period 1980-2020, craft outlets have increased, but it is doubtful that the industry has grown into an innovative and economically and socially sustainable industry. In interview findings, this is often the concern and highlighted.

Due to the lack of raw materials, innovation in the traditional cane industry is currently being stopped. The craftsman primarily designs conventional designs such as chairs, bags, mats, etc. However, if they are supplied with sufficient raw materials and introduced through a rigid government policy with innovative designs, there is a possibility to flourish in the traditional craft sector.

However, due to the low investment power, the lack of technological assistance, and the lack of infrastructure facilities of the country, the transition of the craft market from a local orientation to an international orientation is a slow process. Therefore, it seems that localities producing crafts are still shifting from local to touristic. A significant number of products are produced within a specific region locally, however, there is a tendency in introducing diverse kinds of craft products which is produced in other regions. This can be seen especially in Wewaldeniya. In Molagoda sites, there is a heterogenization in terms of style, pattern and design.

Moreover, if the educated persons such as university student's ideas knowledge and support can be provided to the sector would further facilitate the productivity of the industry.

Finally, influence of innovation and creative ideas, attracting outside labour to the cane industry has been difficult recently. Therefore, it marks the need of a straightforward policy to uplift and flourish the cane industry by solving the existing issues.

Consequently, for this reason, the attraction of the creative craftsmen to this traditional brassware industry in Pilimalawa has become a tragedy. To uplift this industry, the government should therefore have straightforward policies. Measures should be taken to provide the traditional craftsman with raw brass for them to engage in the industry. In addition, to make this industry an interesting one that suits the current situation, they should be advised and provided with new designs.

Strategic intervention through policies should be used to solve the current problems of the industry, primarily to attract consumers for the long-last of the industry. In addition, certain incentives and other incentive programs can be provided by the government to attract creative classes to the sector.

It is also suggested to allocate a quota for entrance to University degree courses focused on art and craft for the candidates of traditional craft families. This facilitation may help to understand the value of these traditional industries and motivate them to explore innovation in order to foster a creative lifestyle.

It can be also suggested to have an online hub, where a possibility to connect artisans and the consumers. The government can set up a hub with all the traditional craftsmen's data, including their contact details, capabilities, accomplishments such as awards and innovative designs to be able to get their order done. Therefore, these kinds of different measures should be taken to revive these destabilized traditional industries.

Moreover, it has recently been difficult to influence innovation and creative concepts, attracting outside labor to the brass industry. Therefore, by solving the current problems, it highlights the need for a simple policy to uplift and prosper the industry.

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